JAPAN'S CARE FOR FAMILIES OF DEAD

Paternal Government Has Assumed Responsibility for About 100,000 of Them.

SYSTEM ALMOST PERFECT

Achieves Combination of Public and Private Interests With Wonderful Results.

By Eleanor Franklin.

TOKIO, April 29.—The paternal Japanese government has assumed responsibility for the support of approximately 100,000 families of dead and disabled soldiers of the empire within the space of a single year, and the methods employed in the discharge of this responsibility are interesting in the extreme and eloquent of the oneness of this people that is astonishing the world with its perfect poise in the midst of a crisis that could not but shake the strongest nation to its very foundation. Statistics are, as a rule, not as attractive as glittering generalities, but the statistics of this subject are so startling that they would catch and hold the attention of anybody.

It would seem that the Japanese relief system is about the most practical and perfect thing of its kind ever organized by a government, and its greatest achievement is a combination of public and private interests, of governmental department's and people's institutions that could not be in any country where the heart of each is not as the heart of all.

No Evidences of Wealth.

The question which soonest presents itself to the foreigner traveling in Japan and observing the evidences of the national poverty is, "Where is the country getting all the money for defraying the expenses of this great war?" The question, far from being answered, resolves itself into an exclamation as proofs of the nation's ability to meet every problem of the crisis daily present themselves. Her ability to meet and defeat what Emperor William once called "the greatest military power on earth," has been demonstrated to the world's everlasting admiration, but her unassuming and unapplauded perfection of home government "for the people and by the people," a government that provides for each individual victim of the war a means of livelihood or direct support, is just as admirable in its way as any other demonstration of the nation's strength.

That the nation is strong cannot be denied, but even in its most startling revelations it is a strength concealed, and the world's admiration must always resolve itself into an interrogation. There are absolutely no evidences in Japan of great wealth. There is not a public building in the whole empire that is not more than equaled in every way by many of the ordinary public school buildings in the United States. There are no mansions of the wealthy that are not, to the American way of thinking, quite like average middle class residences. There are no great commercial enterprises as Americans estimate commercial greatness. There are no localities rich in minerals as Americans estimate riches. There are no wide spreading acres of teeming fertility, no single evidence of greatness in any part of the country, and yet such a thing as abject poverty does not exist—is not permitted, indeed—and beggars are less frequent than in our own land of over-supply, and this is because the heart of one is as the heart of all; because it is a nation in which brotherhood has reached its highest expression; because the "fatherhood of the imperial government" is not an empty phrase.

The Pension Office.

I am indebted to His Excellency, Count Katsura, the Prime Minister, and to his secretary, Baron Nakashima, for introductions to officials in the Department of Home Affairs, who spared no pains to put me in possession of all possible facts in connection with the work for the relief of soldier's and sailor's families in which the government and the people are so religiously engaged. There is a pension bureau in Japan which provides permanent assistance for aged or disabled soldiers of the empire, but it has no connection with the pension office under the supervision of the War Department, which provides instant assistance to families found in pressing need. Whenever a soldier falls in battle this pension department sends an officer at once to investigate the condition of his family, and if assistance is necessary measures are taken to provide it, either directly or through a local institution, without a particle of delay. It is the intention of the government to provide each person a means of earning a livelihood rather than to give financial aid, which must of necessity take the degrading form of alms, and for this purpose industrial homes have been started all over the country, in which thousands of widows and orphans and bereaved, destitute mothers find honorable lodgment and congenial employment making clothes and preparing provisions for the soldiers in Manchuria.

I was taken by an officer of the Home Department of Tokio to visit one of these institutions in Yokohama. We were met at the station by an escort with a "municipal carriage." At least that is what they called it, with just a touch of youthful glee I thought that reminded me of the small boy and his little red wagon. It looked to me very much like any other narrow gauge Japanese victoria and it bore no flauntering coat of arms, nor boasted any prancing thoroughbreds in silver mounted harness. In fact, the only unusual thing about the whole outfit were the betto's boots. A betto is a Japanese coachman and I'm going to write a comic opera one of these days and have a betto chorus, somewhat on the order of George Cohan's "Up in a Hansom, Up in a Hansom, Up in a Hansom Cab." They are such a solemnly important and ridiculously begarmented lot that I think they would make a prodigious hit. And the nags they drive are as funny as they, with their narrow hind quarters and overgrown heads, their great shaggy manes and foretops through which their wicked little eyes gleam for all the world like a skye terrier's.

But those boots! They were cut upon the smartest possible English pattern with broad yellow kid cuffs at the top, and they had an "air" that would have graced the finest turnout in Hyde Park. But at the top of his boots the betto ceased to be a model and the rest of him looked as if he had suddenly fallen heir to the position and the livery of a man five sizes larger than himself, and as we drove merrily along the narrow streets the brass buttons that should have fitted snugly into the small of his back flopped disconsolately against the low top of the driver's seat upon which he was perched with dignity enough for two like him.

Visit to Industrial Home.

All this is merely by the way, but it serves to illustrate the Japanese idea of western magnificence since this coachman and his accessories were designated a "municipal equipage." We first drove to a local government building in which the Yokohama Sho-hei-gikai, "The Society for the Assistance of Soldiers and Sailors and their Families," has its offices. Here was a huge room crowded with flat top desks at each of which two men were busily engaged examining applications and making out formidable looking documents. Beside each desk sat a little wooden box in which glowed a handful of charcoals in a bed of ashes and these constituted all the heating apparatus that the room could evidently boast, although it was March and very cold. The men were mostly dressed in hakama and kimono and wore straw sandals on their feet, and if it hadn't been for the modern office furniture I could have imagined that I had been suddenly dropped into a century gone. I was introduced to the general manager who bowed Japanese fashion two or three times, and drew his breath sharply through his teeth in token of his pleasure in making my acquaintance. We then all sat down around a charcoal box and with Japanese deliberation went over many facts of large interest.

With all its unassuming air this society through this office provided means for the support of 598 families throughout the entire winter and the number is increasing daily with the daily increase of casualties at the front. This Sho-hei-gikai is, I think, a unique institution. It has no immediate connection with the government, but it receives instructions from the Home and War Departments, in regard to cases in the territory under its immediate supervision, and it has from time to time received large funds from the Pension Office in the War Department, because that august body thought such funds would be more judiciously spent by this perfectly organized philanthropic society than by their own officials. The society, however, was far from needing such assistance since it is a people's organization that has its foundation upon the principle of giri-ninjo which means to do good unto others without a thought of what others may do unto you. It is a local institution in Yokohama, but it was shown to me because it is just one of dozens like it throughout the country. It has 50,455 male members who pay annual dues of one yen twenty-five sen each, or sixty-two and a half cents in our money.

The Woman's Branch.

Then there is a woman's branch which maintains itself and does a noble work. The women members are assessed only five sen or two and a half cents a year, but they are privileged to give whatever they wish with the consequence that their department is on quite as solid footing as the main society since it pleases most women to make large sacrifices that they may give liberally to this great cause.

In considering all this, it is well to remember that this is a society which confers no benefit upon its members, a society which has no pay roll except a few clerks whose entire time is required in its service. Every member gives a part of his or her time each week to visiting or committee work of some sort and dense as the population of this province is there is not a woman nor child in it whose exact condition is not known to the society and there is not a soldier in the army who does not owe to it or to one of its kind thanks for some little personal courtesy. Whenever soldiers are to pass through Yokohama station on their way to the front or to military posts in the south, the Sho-hei-gikai appoints a committee to meet them with banners and music and the consequent crowd of well wishers and shouters of "Banzai!" "A thousand lives!" And very often this committee carries to each soldier some small present of tobacco or Japanese dainty to gladden his boyish heart. For they are boys, all of these little Japanese soldiers, or at least they look so.

And the tiny women whom I saw working in the industrial home were like children, many of them, too, and should have been making doll's kimonos instead of those thousands of grim looking uniform shirts that were to go to husbands and fathers and brothers on the firing line in Manchuria. It is an interesting place, that industrial home. It looks as if it had been put up yesterday in a great hurry, and promised a finishing touch later on, when times are not so pressing. It is a low, rambling building, without a vestige of paint on it, but it is put together with an eye to perfect sanitation and plenty of sunlight. In a long wing at one side dozens of women were sitting upon their feet, Japanese fashion, before low sewing machines that were operated by hand, making up mountains of coarse linen into soldier's shirts. One hour in such a position would put my feet so tight "asleep" they would never wake up; but since the same length of time on a chair before a sewing machine run by foot motion would have exactly the same effect upon a Japanese girl, the wisdom of the powers that be has provided for her the native kneeling cushion and the little hand sewing machine, not twelve inches high.

With the Children.

There is a day nursery, among other good things, connected with this institution, and the women who come daily to work may bring their babies and leave them in charge of a competent caretaker, who straps them to the backs of larger children and drives them out into the sunshine to play battledore and shuttlecock whole livelong afternoons. But there are some children who may not play all the time in the sunshine, because they happen to be smart little kiddies, who are able to assume a part of the responsibility for the support of their mothers and grandmothers and baby brothers and sisters. In a bamboo room under a flowering plum tree these little ones sat painting china. They were of the families of china decorators, and in this country the youth learn early to follow in ancestral footsteps. Three of the little group in the room were of one family, and their father had fallen at Liao Yang. It cannot be long, of course, until they are able to earn a good living for the family, since their work is good and there is much china decorating in Japan; but as yet they are mere infants, and so the paternal government provides china for them to work upon, which it afterwards sells in bazaars. And, what is more, this paternal government provides an instructor for them in their dead father's place, that they may become proficient in their hereditary art. That was one of the things which made me glad in this model institution.

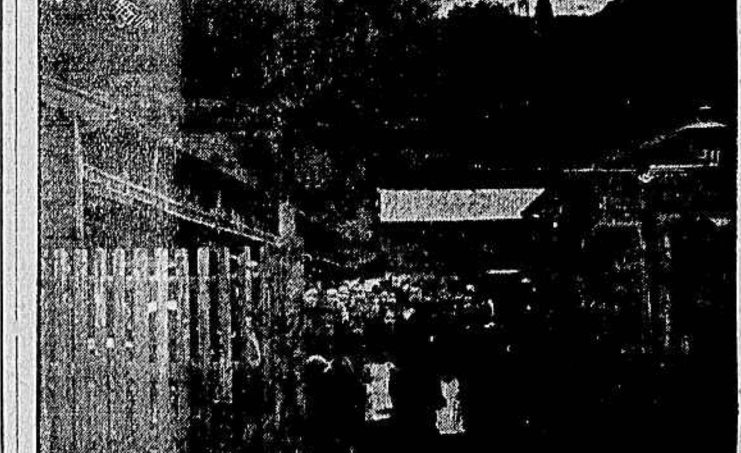
In another room were women and boys engaged in the manufacture of rice straw "coris," or what we call telescopes, for use in traveling. These are made in all sizes by thousands in different philanthropic institutions of this sort all over the country, and many of them find their way into the American market, and may be bought for a dollar or such a matter in almost any department store.

I trained my camera on these industrious little people, but every time I do that in this country, everybody in sight strikes an attitude as if it were Japanese instinct to "pose," so the results are usually more or less stiff.

There is another way peculiarly interesting in which the government helps needy families of slain soldiers, and that is by granting to one family in a town or district a monopoly of the sale of some household commodity, such as matches or soap, and it is surprising with what good grace the small merchants drop these things out of stock and become themselves customers of these self-supporting women and children. That is brotherhood, if you like, and the golden rule improved upon.

One thing more. There are in the Japanese army in active service to-day hundreds of farmers, upon which class the whole nation is dependent, since the country still reckons its income in koku of rice, and the rice fields must be cultivated. There have been many instances where the only man in a farmer family has been called to duty, leaving all the arduous labor of the fields upon the shoulders of a couple of little women and their half-grown children. In these cases every time during the past seasons of sowing and reaping, the work has been done by neighboring men, without a word, without a question as to whether they should or should not, and without so much as a thought of applause or reward. That is "giri-ninjo," the finest thing in the Japanese character, and it is always expressing itself in thousands of little ways. In consequence of these brotherly services, the rice crop for the past season was the largest that the little island empire ever produced, and it is to be hoped that this year Kitsuno, the fox-formed deity of the rice fields, may look with increasing favor upon the little bands of cheerful laborers, who must delve and dig in many acres of knee-deep swamp that will yield them no personal gain.

WAR WIDOWS MAKING SHIRTS FOR SOLDIERS IN THE NEW YOKOHAMA INDUSTRIAL HOME.



INDUSTRIAL HOME FOR JAPANESE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS.

POEMS YOU OUGHT TO KNOW

Whatever your occupation may be, and however crowded your hours with affairs, do not fail to secure at least a few minutes every day for refreshment of your inner life with a bit of poetry.—Professor Charles Eliot Norton.

No. 489.

PRAYER.

By JAMES MONTGOMERY.

Other selections from this author, his portrait, autograph and biographical sketch, have already been printed in this series.

PRAYER is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air;
His watchword at the gates of death—
He enters heaven by prayer.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice
Returning from his ways,
While angels in their songs rejoice
And say: "Behold, he prays!"

The saints in prayer appear as one
In word, and deed, and mind,
When with the Father and His Son,
Their fellowship they find.

Nor prayer is made on earth alone—
The Holy Spirit pleads,
And Jesus on the eternal throne
For sinners intercedes.

O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod—
Lord, teach us how to pray!

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